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OBSERVATIONS OF THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE NEW ZEALAND FUR SEAL (*ARCTOCEPHALUS FORSTERI*) IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

Existing publications indicate that the present distribution of the New Zealand Fur Seal in Western Australia extends from the islands of the Archipelago of Recherche across to Eclipse Island off Albany (King 1969; Abbott 1979; Marlow and King 1974; King 1983; Bonner 1981).

This report deals with the sightings over a three year period of an increasing number of fur seals on a rocky outcrop approximately 300m south of Flinders Island (115°12'E 34°25'S), 8 km S.E. of Cape Leeuwin (Fig. 1). This represents the first recorded sighting of this species in this area since Irwin in 1832 and Clarke in 1842 (Abbott 1979).



Figure 1. New Zealand Fur Seals on a rocky outcrop in the Cape Leeuwin area.

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OBSERVATIONS OF THE NEW ZEALAND FUR SEALS In the Cape Leeuwin Area

The first sighting of seals in the Cape Leeuwin area was in July, 1982. Positive sightings were also made on five subsequent occasions over the next two years (Table 1). Visits to the area between November and February of this period failed to result in any sightings.

Table 1. Record of positive sightings of fur seals in the Cape Leeuwin area.

Date	Location	Number of New Zealand Fur Seals
June 1982	Rocky outcrop 300m south Flinders Island.	Not Counted
July 1982	"	"
12 Aug. 1982	"	3
15 Oct. 1982	"	2
14 Mar. 1984	"	17
1 Apr. 1984	"	18+

The fur seals seen consisted primarily of sub-adults with several adult females, or young bulls. There was no evidence of breeding.

In the Recherche Archipelago

In the Recherche Archipelago New Zealand fur seals have been recorded on Seal Rock, Fur Rock, Hood Island, Daw Island, Salisbury Island, Figure of Eight Island, Capps Island, and Glennie Island (Abbott 1979).

On 3rd October 1983 a colony of approximately 200 New Zealand Fur Seals was recorded on a visit to Rocky Island (120°52'E, 34°5'S). The colony was well established with evidence of recent breeding. The island was also shared by approximately 50 Australian Sea Lions which were also breeding.

DISCUSSION

The appearance of fur seals on the Islands off Cape Leeuwin following an absence of possibly 140 years is indeed encouraging. Marlow and King (1974) had noted an increase in fur seal numbers and island occupation in New Zealand, however this is the first record that this may also be occurring in Western Australia.

Abbott (1979) and King (1983) had established the total population of New Zealand Fur Seals in Western Australia to be 400-500. As the colony on Rocky Island had not been included in these estimates it is possible that a figure of 600-700 may be more accurate.

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